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The situation in the Middle East

Measures to eliminate international terrorism

Letter dated 6 January 2003 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing to draw your attention to the latest horrific act of Palestinian terrorism directed against the citizens of Israel.

Yesterday evening at approximately 6.30 p.m. (local time), in a coordinated attack, two Palestinian suicide bombers blew themselves up in a bustling downtown area of Tel Aviv, in one of the bloodiest terrorist attacks carried out since the onset of the Palestinian campaign of terrorism in September 2000. Just a few metres and a few seconds apart, the two large explosions ripped through a crowded bus stop and a pedestrian mall, turning an ordinary urban scene into a nightmare of chaos and carnage. Packed with nails, bolts and ball bearings to maximize the pain and suffering of the victims, the powerful explosives destroyed the facade of a building, shattered walls and windows of the many shops and residences in the vicinity, and sent glass, shrapnel and even whole bodies flying through the air. To date, 23 civilians are known to have died and more than 100 others were injured. Among those killed were nationals of a number of countries besides Israel, including Ghana, Romania and Bulgaria. Several bodies remain unidentified.

The Tel Aviv bombings come two days after Israeli soldiers discovered the burnt body of 73-year-old Massoud Alon, just a few hours after his family reported him missing. The discovery of Alon's body, which was apparently beaten before it was burned, came after an announcement by the Al Aqsa Brigades, the terrorist wing of Chairman Arafat's own Fatah movement, declaring that it had killed an Israeli civilian.

Following the Tel Aviv attack, several Palestinian terrorist groups rushed to issue competing claims of responsibility — including Islamic Jihad, Hamas and the Al Aqsa Brigades. The Al Aqsa Brigades announcement, published on the group's Internet web site, identified the two suicide terrorists, praised the ongoing "holy Jihad" and promised that "additional suicide operations will occur". The statement

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included the following description of the attack: "The first suicide attacker blew his pure body up in the street full of people and immediately following the second suicide attacker blew himself up on an adjacent road. These suicide attacks cause a large number of fatalities and casualties in the center of the Zionist occupation of our land." A reporter for the satellite television station *Al-Jazeera* who forwarded the Al Aqsa Brigades' claim of responsibility to his station was arrested by Palestinian police and charged with acting against the interests of the Palestinian people.

Israel holds the Palestinian Authority fully responsible for these atrocities carried out by forces loyal to its Chairman, Yasser Arafat. Not only has the Palestinian leadership utterly failed to live up to its responsibilities under international law and Security Council resolutions to fight terrorism, arrest known terrorists, and cease all violence, terrorism and incitement, but it has actively supported and encouraged such attacks through its official media and educational institutions and through the financial and logistical support it has provided to known terrorists.

As if to confirm the abject refusal of the Palestinian leadership to take any steps whatsoever in fulfilment of its obligations to fight terrorism, Farouk Kaddoumi, the head of the political department of the Palestine Liberation Organization, in an interview with the Nazareth-based weekly *Kul al-Arab*, stated that the Palestinian leadership would not act to bring an end to terrorist attacks. "Palestinian resistance is a legitimate project and as long as there is an occupation the fight will continue", said Kaddoumi. With respect to terrorist groups like Hamas, Kaddoumi stated: "We were never different from Hamas. Hamas is a national movement. Strategically, there is no difference between us."

The terrorist legacy of the Palestinian leadership is resurrected in full if it views itself as indistinguishable from terrorist groups like Hamas that are committed to the destruction of the State of Israel. While the Palestinian leadership continues its attempts to manipulate international public opinion by condemning the same attacks for which its own forces are responsible, its lengthy history of airplane hijackings, hostage taking and other contemptible acts of terrorism leave no room for doubt as to the Palestinian leadership's true feelings regarding the legality and morality of targeting innocent civilians. A leadership that inspires its people to commit acts of suicidal terrorism, and celebrates those who do so as "martyrs" rather than murderers, is a leadership that has fatally undermined its legitimacy.

In such an environment, Israel is left with no choice but to take the defensive measures necessary to protect its citizens from harm. The continuation of the Palestinian campaign of terrorism will only serve to prolong the agony of both peoples and make the path to peace and reconciliation that much more difficult to advance. Efforts by responsible members of the international community to bring the parties together are condemned to failure as long as the basic right to life of Israelis is so routinely and gruesomely violated. Granting concessions to a regime that supports and encourages such violations is the surest guarantee that violence and terrorism will continue. Only once such attacks are roundly rejected, both in word and deed, can we progress to negotiations, which are the only means to achieve a genuine and lasting peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

I submit the present letter in follow-up to numerous letters detailing the campaign of Palestinian terrorism that began in September 2000.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the present letter circulated as a document of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 36 and 160, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Arye **Mekel**